

# Tathagata-garbha Sutra

(Tripitaka No. 0667)

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Thus I heard one time: The Bhagavan was staying on Grdhra-kuta near Raja-grha in the lecture hall of a many-tiered pavilion built of fragrant sandalwood. He had attained buddhahood ten years previously and was accompanied by an assembly of hundred thousands of great bhikshus and a throng of bodhisattvas and great beings sixty times the number of sands in the Ganga. All had perfected their zeal and had formerly made offerings to hundred thousands of myriad legions of Buddhas. All could turn the Irreversible Dharma Wheel. If a being were to hear their names, he would become irreversible in the unsurpassed path. Their names were Bodhisattva Dharma-mati, Bodhisattva Simha-mati, Bodhisattva Vajra-mati, Bodhisattva Harmoniously Minded, bodhisattva Shri-mati, Bodhisattva Candra-prabha, Bodhisattva Ratna-prabha, Bodhisattva Purna-candra, Bodhisattva Vikrama, Bodhisattva Ananta-vikramin, Bodhisattva Trailokya-vikramin, Bodhisattva Avalokiteshvara, Bodhisattva Mahasthama-prapta, Bodhisattva Gandha-hastin, Bodhisattva Sugandha, Bodhisattva Surpassing Sublime Fragrance, Bodhisattva Supreme matrix, Bodhisattva Surya-garbha, Bodhisattva Ensign Adornment, Bodhisattva Great Arrayed Banner, Bodhisattva Vimala-keetu, Bodhisattva Boundless Light, Bodhisattva Light Giver, Bodhisattva Vimala-prabha, Bodhisattva Pramudita-raja, Bodhisattva Sada-pramudita, Bodhisattva Ratna-pani, Bodhisattva Akasha-garbha, Bodhisattva King of the Light of Virtue, Bodhisattva Independent Dharani King, Bodhisattva Dharani, Bodhisattva Sarva-shoka-pramardin, Bodhisattva Liberating All Beings from Sorrow, Bodhisattva Joyful Mind, Bodhisattva Purna-manoratha, Bodhisattva Eternal Satisfaction, Bodhisattva All-Splendour, Bodhisattva Candra-prabha, Bodhisattva Ratna-mati, Bodhisattva Body of a Transformation Woman, Bodhisattva Great Thunderclap, Bodhisattva Kalyana-mitra, Bodhisattva Not-irrelevant Views, Bodhisattva Sarva-dharma-svatantra, Bodhisattva Maitreya and Bodhisattva Manjushri. There were also present bodhisattvas and mahasattvas just like them from incalculable Buddha kshetras whose number equalled sixty times the number of sands in the Ganga. Together with incalculable Devas, Nagas, Yaksas, Gandharvas, Asuras, Garudas, Kimnaras and Mahoraga, they all gathered to pay their respects and make offerings.

Now the Buddha sat up straight in meditation in the sandalwood pavilion and, with his rddhi (miraculous power) put on a miraculous display. There appeared in the sky a countless number of thousand-petaled lotus flowers as large as chariot wheels, filled with colors and fragrances that one could not begin to enumerate. In the center of each flower was a conjured image of a Buddha. The flowers rose and covered the heavens like a ratna banner, each flower giving forth countless rays. The petals all simultaneously unfolded their splendor and then, through the Buddha rddhi, all withered in an instant. Within the

flowers all the Buddha images sat cross-legged in the lotus position, and each issued forth countless hundred thousands of rays. The adornment of the spot at the time was so miraculous (adbhuta) that the whole assembly rejoiced and danced ecstatically. In fact, it was so very strange and adbhuta that all began to wonder why all the countless wonderful flowers should suddenly be destroyed. As they withered and darkened, the smell they gave off was foul and loathsome.

But at that point the Bhagavan realized why the bodhisattvas were perplexed, so he addressed Vajramati saying, "kulaputra. If there is anything in the Buddha's teaching that perplexes you, feel free to ask about it." Bodhisattva Vajramati knew that everyone in the whole assembly was perplexed, and so addressed the Buddha, saying, "bhagavan. why are there conjured Buddha images in all of the innumerable flowers? And for what reason did they ascend into the heavens and cover the world? And why did the Buddha images each issue forth countless hundreds of thousands of rays?" Everyone in the assembly looked on and then joined his hands together in respect. At that point, Bodhisattva Vajramati spoke in gatha, saying:

"Never ever have I witnessed  
A miraculous display like today's.  
To see hundreds of thousands and millions of buddhas  
Seated in the padmagarbha (lotus-calyx),  
Each emitting countless rays,  
Filling all the kshetras,  
Scattering the dirt of false teachers,  
Adorning all the worlds!  
The lotuses suddenly wilted;  
There was not one which was not disgusting.  
Now tell us,  
Why did you display this conjured vision?  
We see buddhas more numerous than  
The sands of the Ganga,  
And incalculable transfigured forms.  
Never before have I seen  
The like of what I am witnessing now.  
I wish you would give us a clear explanation."

At that time the bhagavan spoke to Vajramati and the other bodhisattvas, saying, "kulaputras. there is a Vaipulya Sutra named 'Tathagata-garbha'. It was because I wanted to expound it to you that I showed you these signs. You should all listen attentively and ponder it well." All said, "Excellent. We very much wish to hear it."

The Buddha said, "kulaputras, there is a comparison that can be drawn between the countless flowers conjured up by the Buddha that suddenly withered and the innumerable conjured buddha images with their many adornments, seated in the lotus position within the flowers, who cast forth light so exceedingly rare that there was no one in the assembly who did not show reverence. In a similar fashion, kulaputras, when I regard all

beings with my buddha cakshur (eye), I see that hidden within the kleshas (barbs) of raga (greed), lobha (confusion), dvesha (hatred) and moha (obscuration) there is seated augustly and unmovingly the Tathagata jnana , the Tathagata-vision and the Tathagata kaya. kulaputras, all beings, though they find themselves with all sorts of kleshas, have a tathagata-garbha that is eternally unsullied, and that is replete with virtues no different from my own. Moreover, kulaputras, it is just like a person with supernatural vision who can see the bodies of tathagatas seated in the lotus position inside the flowers, even though the petals are not yet unfurled; whereas after the wilted petals have been removed, those tathagatas are manifested for all to see. In similar fashion, the Buddha can really see the beings (sattva) tathagata-garbha. And because he wants to disclose the tathagata-garbha to them, he expounds the sutras and the Dharma, in order to destroy kleshas and reveal the buddha-dhatu (buddha-element, buddha-nature). kulaputras, such is the dharma of all Buddhas. Whether or not buddhas appear in the world, the tathagata-garbha of all beings are eternal and unchanging. It is just that they are covered by kleshas of sentient beings. When the Tathagata appears in the world, he expounds the Dharma far and wide to remove their ignorance and tribulation and to purify their universal wisdom. kulaputras, if there is a bodhisattva who has faith in this teaching and who practices it with ekagra-citta (single-pointed citta), he will attain vimukti and correct universal enlightenment and for the sake of the world he will perform Buddha deeds far and wide."

At that point, the Bhagavan expressed himself in gatha, saying:

"It is like the wilted flowers;  
Before their petals have opened,  
One with supernatural vision can see  
The unstained Tathagata-kaya.  
After the wilted flowers are removed,  
One sees, without obstacle, the Teacher,  
Who, in order to sever kleshas,  
Triumphantly appears in the world.  
The Buddha sees that all kinds of beings  
Universally possess the tathagata-garbha.  
It is covered by countless kleshas,  
Just like a tangle of smelly, wilted petals.  
So I, on behalf of all beings,  
Everywhere expound the Saddharma,  
In order to help them remove their kleshas  
And quickly reach the Buddha way.  
I see with my Buddha cakshur  
That in the bodies of all beings  
There lies concealed the buddha-garbha,  
So I expound the Dharma in order to reveal it.

"Or kulaputras, it is like pure honey in a cave or a tree, surrounded and protected by a countless swarm of bees. It may happen that a person comes along who knows some clever techniques. He first gets rid of the bees and takes the honey, and then does as he

will with it, eating it or giving it away far and wide. Similarly, kulaputras, all beings have the Tathagata-garbha. It is like pure honey in a cave or tree, but it is covered by kleshas, which, like a swarm of bees, keep one from getting to it. With my Buddha eye I see it clearly, and with appropriate virtuous expedients I expound the Dharma, in order to destroy kleshas and reveal the Buddha vision. And everywhere I perform Buddha deeds for the benefit of the world." Thereupon the bhagavan expressed himself in gatha, saying:

"It is just like what happens when the honey in a cave or tree,  
Though surrounded by countless bees,  
Is taken by someone who knows an upaya  
To first get rid of the swarm.  
The tathagatagarbha of sentient beings  
Is like the honey in a cave or tree.  
The entanglement of ignorance and tribulation  
Is like the swarm of bees  
That keep one from getting to it.  
For the sake of all beings,  
I expound the saddharma with virtuous expedients  
Removing the klesha bees,  
Revealing the tathagatagarbha.  
Endowed with eloquence that knows no obstacle,  
I preach the Dharmamrta,  
Compassionately relieving beings,  
Everywhere helping them to correct perfect enlightenment .

"Or, kulaputras, it is like a kernel of wheat that has not yet had its husk removed. Someone who is impoverished might foolishly disdain it, and consider it to be something that should be discarded. But when it is cleaned, the kernel can always be used. In like fashion, good sons, when I observe beings with my Buddha cakshur, I see that the husk of kleshas covers their limitless Tathagata vision. So with appropriate upayas I expound the Dharma, to enable them to remove those kleshas, purify their jnana paramita (tenth bodhisattva stage) and to attain in all worlds the anuttara-samyak-sambodhi." Thereupon, the bhagavan expressed this in gatha, saying:

"It is just like what happens when all the kernels,  
The husks of which have not yet been washed away,  
Are disdained by someone who is impoverished,  
And said to be something to be discarded.  
But although the outside seems like something useless,  
The inside is genuine and not to be destroyed.  
After the husks are removed,  
It becomes food fit for a king.  
I see that all kinds of beings  
Have a buddhagarbha hidden by kleshas.  
I preach the removal of those things  
To enable them to attain universal wisdom.

Just as I have a Tathagata dhatu,  
So do all beings.  
When they develop it and purify it,  
They quickly attain the unexcelled path.

"Or, kulaputras, it is like the genuine gold that has fallen into a pit of waste and been submerged and not seen for years. The pure gold does not decay, yet no one knows that it is there. But suppose there came along someone with supernatural vision, who told people, 'Within the impure waste there is a genuine gold trinket. You should get it out and do with it as you please.' Similarly, kulaputras, the impure waste is your innumerable klesha. The genuine gold trinket is your tathagatagarbha. For this reason, the Tathagata widely expounds the Dharma to enable all beings to destroy their kleshas, attain correct perfect enlightenment and perform Buddha deeds."

At that time bhagavan expressed himself in gatha, saying:

"It is just like what happens when gold is submerged  
In impure waste, where no one can see it.  
But someone with supernatural vision sees it  
And tells people about it, saying  
'If you get it out and wash it clean,  
You may do with it as you will,'  
Which causes their relatives and family all to rejoice.  
The sugata-vision is like this.  
He sees that for all kinds of beings,  
The Tathagata dhatu is not destroyed,  
Though it is submerged in the muddy silt of kleshas.  
So he appropriately expounds the Dharma  
And enables them to manage all things,  
So that the kleshas covering the Buddha dhatu  
Are quickly removed and beings are purified."

"Or, kulaputras, it is like a store of treasure hidden beneath an impoverished household. The treasure cannot speak and say that it is there, since it isn't conscious of itself and doesn't have a voice. So no one can discover this treasure store. It is just the same with beings. But there is nothing that the power of the Tathagata's vision is afraid of. The treasure store of the great dharma is within beings' bodies. It does not hear and it is not aware of the addictions and delusions of the five desires. The samsara cakra turns and beings are subjected to countless dukkhas. Therefore Buddhas appear in the world and reveal to them the Tathagata-dharma-garbha in their bodies. And they believe in it and accept it and purify their universal wisdom. Everywhere on behalf of beings he reveals the Tathagatagarbha. He employs an eloquence which knows no obstacle on behalf of the Buddha's faithful. In this way, kulaputras, with my Buddha eye I see that all beings possess the Tathagatagarbha. And so on behalf of bodhisattvas I expound this Dharma." At that point, the Tathagata expressed himself in gatha, saying:

"It is like a store of treasure

Inside the house of an impoverished man.  
The owner is not aware of it,  
Nor can the treasure speak.  
For a very long time it is buried in darkness,  
As there is no one who can tell of its presence.  
When you have treasure but do not know of it,  
This causes poverty and suffering.  
When the buddha eye observes beings,  
It sees that, although they transmigrate  
Through the five gati  
There is a great treasure in their bodies  
That is eternal and unchanging.  
When he sees this, the Buddha  
Teaches on behalf of all beings,  
Enabling them to attain the Jnanagarba (knowledge matrix)  
And the great wealth of widely caring for one another.  
If you believe what I have taught you  
About all having a treasure store,  
And practice it faithfully and ardently,  
Employing virtuous expedients,  
You will quickly attain the unexcelled marga (marga-satya).

"Or, kulaputras, it is like the pit inside amra fruit which does not decay. When you plant it in the ground, it grows into the largest and most regal of trees. In the same manner, kulaputras, when I look at beings with my Buddha vision, I see that the tathagatagarbha is surrounded by a husk of ignorance, just as the seeds of a fruit are only found at its core. kulaputra, that tathagatagarbha is cold and unripe. It is the profound nirvananirvarta that is brought about by Maha jnana (great wisdom). It is called the Samyak sambuddha (perfect Buddha), the Tathagata, the Arhat and so on. kulaputras, after the Tathagata has observed beings, he reveals this message in order to purify the bodhisattva mahasattva jnana."

At that point, the bhagavan expressed himself in gatha, saying:

"It is just like the pit of an amra fruit  
Which does not decay.  
Plant it in the earth  
And inevitably a great tree grows.  
The Tathagata's faultless vision  
Sees that the tathagata garbha  
Within the body of beings  
Is just like the seed within a flower or fruit.  
Though ignorance covers the Buddhagarbha,  
You ought to have faith and realize  
That you are possessed of samadhi wisdom,  
None of which can be destroyed.  
For this reason I expound the Dharma

And reveal the tathagatagarbha,  
That you may quickly attain the unexcelled (anuttara) path,  
Just as a fruit grows into the most regal of trees.

"Or, kulaputras, it is like a man with a statue of pure gold, who was to travel through the narrow roads of another country and feared that he might be victimized and robbed. So he wrapped the statue in worn-out rags so that no one would know that he had it. On the way the man suddenly died, and the golden statue was discarded in an open field. Travelers trampled it and it became totally filthy. But a person with supernatural vision saw that within the worn-out rags there was a pure gold statue, so he unwrapped it and all paid homage to it. Similarly, kulaputras, I see the different beings with their many kleshad, transmigrating through the long night of endless samsara and I perceive that within their bodies is the wondrous Tathagatagarbha. They are august and pure and no different from myself. For this reason the Buddha expounds the Dharma for beings, that they might sever those kleshad and purify their Tathagata jnana. I turn the Dharmacakra again and again in order to convert all worlds."

At that point, the bhagavan expressed himself in gatha, saying:

"It is like a traveller to another country  
Carrying a golden statue,  
Who wraps it in dirty, worn-out rags  
And discards it in an unused field.  
One with supernatural vision sees it  
And tells other people about it.  
They remove the dirty rags and reveal the statue  
And all rejoice greatly.  
My supernatural vision is like this.  
I see that beings of all sorts  
Are entangled in kleshad and evil actions  
And are plagued with all the sufferings of samsara.  
Yet I also see that within  
The dust of ignorance of all beings,  
The Tathagatagarbha sits motionless,  
Great and indestructible.  
After I have seen this,  
I explain to bodhisattvas that  
Kleshad and evil actions  
Cover the most victorious body.  
You should endeavor to sever them,  
And manifest the Tathagata jnana.  
It is the refuge of all --  
deva, manushya (human being), naga and bhuta.

"Or, kulaputras, it is like a woman who is impoverished, vile, ugly and hated by others, who bears an Arya son in her womb. He will become a Cakra-vartin King, a ruler of all

the four directions. But she does not know his future history and constantly thinks of him as a base-born, impoverished child. In like fashion, kulaputras, the Tathagata sees that all beings are carried around by the samsara cakra, receiving suffering and poison, but their bodies possess the Tathagatagarbha. Just like that woman, they do not realize this. This is why the Tathagata everywhere expounds the Dharma, saying, 'kulaputras, do not consider yourselves inferior or base. You all personally possess the Buddhadhatu.' If you exert yourselves and destroy your past evils, then you will receive the title of bodhisattva or Bhagavan and convert and save countless beings.

At that point, the Bhagavan expressed himself in gatha, saying:

"It is like an impoverished woman  
Whose appearance is common and vile,  
But who bears an Arya son  
Who will become a Cakravartin king.  
Replete with Seven Jewels and all virtues,  
He will possess as king the four quarters of the earth.  
But she is incapable of knowing this  
And conceives only thoughts of inferiority.  
I see that all beings  
Are like infants in distress.  
Within their bodies is the Tathagatagarbha,  
But they do not realize it.  
So I tell bodhisattvas,  
'Be careful not to consider yourselves inferior.  
Your bodies are Tathagatagarbhas;  
They always contain  
The world's light of saving grace.'  
If you exert yourselves  
And do not spend a lot of time  
Sitting in the meditation hall,  
You will attain the path of very highest siddhi  
And save limitless beings."

"Or, kulaputras, it is like a master foundryman casting a statue of pure gold. After casting is complete, it is inverted and placed on the ground. Although the outside is scorched and blackened, the inside is unchanged. When it is opened and the statue taken out, the golden color is radiant and dazzling. Similarly, kulaputras, when the Tathagata observes all beings, he sees that the Buddhagarbha is inside their bodies replete with all its many virtues. After seeing this, he reveals far and wide that all beings will obtain relief. He removes kleshas with his Vajra jnana and reveals the Buddha-kaya like a person uncovering a golden statue."

At that point, the Bhagavan expressed himself in gatha, saying:

"It is like a great foundry  
With countless golden statues.



Foolish people look at the outside  
And see only the darkened earthen molds.  
The master foundryman estimates that they have cooled,  
And opens them to extract their contents.  
All impurity is removed  
And the features clearly revealed.  
With my Buddha vision  
I see that all beings are like this.  
Within the mud shell of passions,  
All have the Tathagata-nature.  
By means of vajra jnana,  
We break the mold of the kleshas  
And reveal the Tathagatagarbha,  
Like pure, shining gold.  
Just as I have seen this  
And so instructed all the bodhisattvas,  
So should you accept it,  
And convert in turn all other beings."

At that point, the Bhagavan spoke to Vajramati and the other bodhisattva mahasattvas, saying, "Whether you are bhikshu or upasaka, kula putra and duhita, you should accept, recite, copy, revere and widely expound this "Tathagatagarbha Sutra" for the benefit of others. The virtues that you will derive from it are inestimable. Vajramati, if there were a bodhisattva who, for the sake of the Buddha path, worked diligently and assiduously, or who cultivated abhijna, or who entered all of the samadhis, or who desired to plant the kushala mulas (roots of virtue), or who worshiped the present-day Buddhas, more numerous than the sands of the Ganga, or who erected more Seven-jeweled stupas than there are sands in the Ganga, of a height of ten yojana and a depth and breadth of one yojana, or who set up in those stupas seven-jeweled couches covered with divine paintings, or who daily erected for each Buddha more seven-jewelled stupas than there are sands in the Ganga and who presented them to each Tathagata and bodhisattva and shravaka in the assembly, or who did this sort of thing everywhere for all the present day Buddhas, whose number is greater than the sands of the Ganga, or who erected fifty times more jewelled stupas than there are sands in the Ganga and who presented them to each Tathagata and bodhisattva and shravaka in the assembly, or who did this sort of thing everywhere for all the present day Buddhas, whose number is greater than the sands of the Ganga, or who erected fifty times more jewelled stupas than there are sands in the Ganga and who presented them as an offering to fifty times more Buddhas and bodhisattvas and sravakas in the assembly than there are sands in the Ganga and who did this for countless hundreds and thousands and tens of thousands of kalpa, Vajramati, that bodhisattva would still not be the equal of the person who finds deep joy (pramudita, first bodhisattva stage) and perfect enlightenment in the 'Tathagatagarbha Sutra', who accepts it, recites it, copies it, or even reveres but a single one of its metaphors. Vajramati, even though the number of kushala mulas and virtues planted by those kulaputras on behalf of the Buddhas is incalculable, it does not come to a hundredth or a thousandth or any possible calculable fraction of the number of virtues attained by the kula putra and duhita

who revere the 'Tathagatagarbha Sutra'."

At that point, the Bhagavan expressed himself in gatha, saying:

"If there is a person seeking perfect Bodhi  
Who listens to and accepts this sutra,  
And who copies and reveres  
Even a single gatha,  
The subtle, profound Tathagatagarbha  
Will instantly come forth, accompanied with elation.  
If you give yourself to this true teaching  
Your virtues will be incalculable.  
If there is a person seeking Sambodhi  
Who has attained great spiritual powers,  
And who desires to make an offering  
To the Buddhas of the ten directions  
And to the bodhisattvas and shravakas of the assembly,  
The number of which is greater  
Than the sands of the Ganga,  
A hundred million times incalculable;  
If for each of the Buddhas  
He constructed a marvellous jewelled stupa  
Ten yojanas in height  
And a breadth of forty li,  
Within which he would bestow a seven-jeweled seat,  
With all the marvels  
Appropriate for the august Teacher,  
Covered with divine pictures and cushions,  
Each one with its own unique designs;  
If he offered to the Buddhas and the Sangha  
An incalculable number of these,  
More than the sands of the Ganga,  
And if he offered them  
Without ceasing day or night  
For hundreds and thousands  
And tens of thousands of kalpa,  
The virtues he would obtain in this manner  
Could not be compared with  
The far greater virtues of  
The wise person who listens to this sutra,  
Who accepts even a single metaphor from it  
And who explains it for the benefit of others.  
Beings who take refuge in it  
Will quickly attain the unexcelled path.  
Bodhisattvas who devote their thought  
To the deep Tathagatagarbha,

Know that all beings possess it  
And quickly attain the unexcelled."

At that time the Bhagavan again addressed Bodhisattva Vajramati, saying, "An incalculable time far back in the distant past, longer ago than many inconceivable asamkhyeykalpa there was a buddha who was called the King of Bestowing Eternal Light, Tathagata, Arhat, Samyaksambuddha Vidya-carana-sampanna Sugata Lokavit Anuttara-purusha-damya-sarathi Shasta-deva-manushyanam Buddha Bhagavan. Vajramati, why was he called the King of Bestowing Eternal Light? When that Buddha was originally practicing the bodhisattva path and descended as a spirit into the womb he always gave off light which penetrated and illuminated in an instant even the tiniest atoms of all the thousands of Buddha worlds in the ten directions. Any being who saw this light was filled with joy. His kleshas were destroyed; he became endowed with the power of form; his wisdom was perfected; and he attained an eloquence which knew no obstacle. If a hell-being, preta-bhuta (hungry ghost), tiryagyon (animal), Yama King, Lord of the Dead, or an asura saw this light, all of his rebirths in evil realms were cut off and he was born as a deva. If any deva saw this light, he attained irreversibility in the highest path and was endowed with the five abhijna. If anyone who had attained irreversibility saw this light, he attained Anutpattika-dharma-kshanti (endurance of the nonproduction-dharma) and the fifty virtues dharani. Vajramati, all the lands illuminated by that light became stately and pure, like translucent porcelain, with golden cords marking out the paths, luxuriant with the fragrance of various kinds of jewelled trees, flowers, and fruits. Light breezes blew gently through them, producing soft, subtle sounds that expounded freely and unrestrainedly the Triple Jewel, the bodhisattva virtues, the power of kushala mulas, the study of the path, samadhi and vimukti (liberation). Beings who heard it all attained joy in the Dharma. Their faith was made firm and they were forever freed from the realms of evil rebirth. Vajramati, because all the beings of the ten directions were instantly enveloped in light, at six o'clock every morning and evening they joined their palms together and offered worship. Vajramati, until the time he attained Buddhahood and Parinirvana, the place where that bodhisattva issued forth from the womb always shone with light. And after his parinirvana the stupa in which his ashes were kept also gleamed with light. Consequently, the inhabitants of the heavenly realms called him the Eternally Light-bestowing King. Vajramati, when Eternally Light-bestowing King Tathagata Arhat Samyaksambuddha first attained Buddhahood, among his Dharma shravakas there was a bodhisattva named Unending Light, as well as a group of two billion other bodhisattvas. The mahasattva Bodhisattva Unending Light turned toward the spot where the Buddha was and asked about the 'Tathagatagarbha Sutra', and the Buddha expounded it. He was in his seat for fifty long kalpas. And because he protected the thoughts of all the bodhisattvas, his voice reached everywhere in the ten Buddha worlds, even down to the smallest atoms, and it spread to hundreds of thousands of Buddha kshetras. Because of the numberless different backgrounds of the bodhisattvas, he presented hundreds of thousands of metaphors. He called it the 'Mahayana Tathagatagarbha Sutra'. All the bodhisattvas who heard him preach this Sutra accepted it, recited it and practiced it just as it had been explained. All but four of the bodhisattvas attained buddhahood. Vajramati, you must not regard them as exceptional. How could Bodhisattva Unending Light be different from you? You are identical with him. The four bodhisattvas who had not yet

attained buddhahood were Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara, Maha-sthama-prapta and you, Vajramati. Vajramati, the 'Tathagatagarbha Sutra' has an abundant capacity. Anyone who hears it can attain the Path of the Buddha."

Then the Buddha again expressed himself in gatha, saying:

"Countless kalpas ago  
A Buddha named King of Light  
Always shone forth great light  
And illumined innumerable kshetras everywhere.  
Bodhisattva Unending Light  
First attained the way under that Buddha,  
And requested this sutra.  
The Buddha accordingly preached it.  
All those who encountered it were Jinas,  
And all those who heard it  
Attained buddhahood,  
Except for four bodhisattvas.  
Manjushri, Avalokiteshvara,  
Maha-sthama-prapta and Vajramati --  
These four bodhisattvas  
All formerly heard this Dharma.  
Of them, Vajramati  
Was the most gifted disciple.  
At the time he was called Unending Light  
And had already heard this sutra.  
When I originally sought the way  
At the Lion Throne marking Bodhi-manda,  
I too once received this sutra  
And practiced it as I had heard it.  
Because of these kushala mulas (virtue-roots),  
I quickly attained the Buddha path.  
Therefore all bodhisattvas  
Ought to uphold and preach this sutra.  
After you have heard it  
And practiced just as it has been explained,  
You will become Buddhas just like I am now.  
If a person upholds this sutra,  
He will comport himself like the Bhagavan.  
If a person obtains this sutra,  
He will be called 'Protector of the Buddhadharma',  
And then, on behalf of the world, he will protect  
What all the Buddhas proclaim.  
If anyone upholds this sutra,  
He will be called 'The Dharma King',  
And in the eyes of the world

He will deserve to be praised  
Like the Bhagavan."

Then, when the Bhagavan had finished expounding this sutra, Vajramati, together with the four groups of bodhisattvas, the Devas, the Gandharvas, the Asuras and the rest, rejoiced at what they had heard the Buddha explain and they practiced it as they had been told.

(End of the Sutra)

(Translated by William H. Grosnick, published in "Buddhism In Practice" (Donald S. Lopez [ed.], Princeton University Press, 1995)

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